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ABSTRACT

This report is the result of a conference sponsored by the Speech Association of America in August 1968. Focusing attention on the speech communication aspects of current social problems, the report includes nine position papers in the following areas: communication breakdown and its effect on tension, unrest, and alienation; types and examples of communication failures; examples of recent studies on social problems; suggestions for future research; and recommendations for making the speech curriculum more relevant, particularly to the needs of minority groups. The report also includes recommendations for research and action needed to achieve social relevance in the speech communication profession. The report concludes with a manifesto which raises issues regarding the relevancy of the speech profession to the needs of contemporary society. (Author/RN)

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Summary Report

CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Sponsored by

The Speech Association of America

Edited by

William Work

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FOREWORD

An attempt has been made in the pages that follow to record something of the substance, (and hopefully something of the spirit) of the deliberations that took place at a meeting held at the Palmer House in Chicago on August 8-9, 1968 under the auspices of the Speech Association of America. The meeting was called by SAA President Douglas Ehninger in response to expressions of concern voiced by individual members of the Association and in response to a call for greater social relevance voiced by the New Orleans Conference on research and instruction.

No effort has been made to present here a full transcript of the Chicago meeting. This report includes the brief "position papers" of the conference, the report of a subcommittee on research and action programs that was formed, a copy of the Manifesto created and distributed by the committee, plus an appended item or two.

It is hoped that this modest document may serve as a stimulus to the profession as it seeks to address itself to the speech-communication dimensions of current social issues and problems.

W.W.

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Ehninger: Several months of active planning have preceded this meeting. The first phase was a round of exploratory correspondence in which we sought the opinions of various individuals in different parts of the country. We were concerned about receiving opinions from persons representing different areas of speech. I can report without exaggeration that the response was uniformly enthusiastic. As one might expect, there were some differences of opinion regarding the role that the Association might play in relation to social problems, differences of opinion concerning points of attack and emphasis, but no one tried to discourage our efforts in any way; most tried to encourage them. As a matter of fact, there were so many suggestions that we had to be somewhat arbitrary in setting up the agenda that was sent out to you. It seemed appropriate to try to focus on the communication aspect of the various kinds of problems with which we are here concerned. Ultimately, we will want to consider the Association role in these matters, and we hope that future directions will in some manner be identified.

Editor's Note: At this juncture, Ehninger invited those members of the group who were prepared to do so, to present a brief position statement. Subsequently, the authors of the statements were given an opportunity to modify them, if they wished. In most instances, therefore, the individual statements that follow were edited by their authors after their return from the Chicago meeting.

JACK CONDON
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

When we look around us we see The New Math and the Modern English Grammarians, by now so familiar that they seem neither particularly new nor modern. But when we look at ourselves we find mostly the Old Speech. "Old Speech" can be characterized by the following: (1) homogeneous standards of "good speaking" which not only ignore the great variety of ethnic and "subcultural patterns" of speaking in our society today, but which are also based on vague standards of authority, rather than descriptive studies of contemporary speech in America today; (2) a preoccupation with Great Men and Great Speeches, determined more by our tradition than by necessity, and with the apparent effect--to judge by journal articles and curricula--of deciding that some particular speech was or was not a "good speech;" (3) a blindness or inability to describe and examine the function of speech in the U.S., the U.S. today, including the functions of the mass media, polls, dissent, etc. For these and other reasons, there is little wonder that many teachers have to "explain" "Speech" as a discipline to colleagues in other disciplines, or that we are still largely associated with platform speaking, self-improvement, and organized debate.

In contrast, I would like to see: (1) descriptive studies of ongoing contemporary speaking which is truly representative of "speech" in the U.S. and abroad, studies which would attempt to describe what <u>is</u> and not whether or not this or that kind of speaking passes the standards of authorities; (2) an increased concern with the role of the student as listener--and as one who can evaluate and respond in meaningful ways. (A course which spends a week on "after-dinner speaking" and one day on "How to Ask a Question" has more than priorities mixed up.) (3) In keeping with the previous observation, our interests should not be directed to "the politician" or "the preacher," traditional roles which qualified as "suitable for study," but rather we should pay particular attention to those influencial speakers who affect most persons, such as news commentators on television. (4) The use of television, film, posters, picketing, marches, rallies, songs of protest and support and the rest of the rhetorical media and milieu of today should be an integral part of our studies and our teaching--and not added for variety or "color," or dismissed as "outside of our departmental interests." (5) We should take a bolder and more innovative role in exploring new speech forms, examining viable avenues of expression and dissent, and presenting our ideas to a larger audience, outside of our classrooms and colleges.

GET OUT OF YOUR BAG AND DO YOUR THING
Frank E. X. Dance

Getting out of my bag so that I can do my thing has been a goal I didn't even recognize for the first thirty-five years of my life. In fact for the most of that time I couldn't even get straight enough to recognize my bag much less my thing. When I did (with the help of people and of writings by Ralph Gerard, Carl Rogers, Jack Gibb, Timothy Leary, Malcolm X and others) the reality blew my mind. Still, minds come back after the wind dies down--at least I think most of mine did. When I got together I discovered that a lot of the things I thought were so right, so clear, so helpful were instead wrong, cloudy, and disabling to the gradual acquisition of autonomy for me and for everyone else. I guess that's my thing--the gradual acquisition of autonomy for me and for everyone. I am committed to communication, and to speech-communication because both are absolutely essential to human autonomy.

The search for autonomy, for self-realization, for self-actualization is what I see student power, black power, labor power, being all about and what I see racism, ultra-traditionalism, economic power as being against. Our current economic sophistication brings with it an ever greater need for the denial of individuality rather than what we all want, the affirmation of individuality.

As a speech-communication learner, what can I say about the interrelationships among autonomy, authority, becoming, and speech-communication? If there is nothing to be said then that should be said first and second we should flush the whole field because it isn't worth wasting any more time on. But I think there are things to be said, I think speech-communication is intrinsically involved in self-realization and I believe that it's the job of the speech-communication field to show how this is so and to show how frustrations of speech-communication have played a role in the pathological behaviors that have brought us to where we're at.

I don't like where we're at. I don't like it for me, for my wife, for my kids, for my fellow learners, or for anyone else. I want to do what I can to get us up from where we're at and to move us towards where we want to be. Speech-communication is absolutely necessary for both of these moves-out, and up. I want my colleagues to help identify the role of communication in crisis causation and the role of communication in crisis solution. I want to see how [illegible]n communication theory can be used to analyze human problems and lead us toward the[illegible]tion.

Given the statistical definition of information, the increase in entropy in our social structures creates a corresponding possibility of an increase in information. The more an individual is challenged by varities of choices the more he needs to make his choices himself and thus move himself toward self-actualization, self-reliance, and autonomy. The same holds for social groups. If our research is right concerning the value of participation in decision making and commitment, why then we in speech-communication must make it clear that any political or economic policies that rob a man of participation and choice are communicatively disastrous and reduce the possibility of growth of individual autonomy. If we believe in the inherent value of communicative openess, we've got to practice it ourselves and then tell others of its essential value. We're already late. Malcolm X in his Autobiography said it plain:

> "I'm telling it like it is!....Raw, naked truth exchanged between the black and the white man is what a whole lot more of is needed in this country--to clear the air of the racial mirages, cliches, and lies that this country's very atmosphere has been filled with for four thousand years."(p. 273)

Malcolm X told it for himself. I don't see the root problem as racially bound, but I do see racism as a result of the conflict between autonomy and dependency and I think we've got to straighten ourselves out in the area of race before we are going to have much time to devote to straightening out the other areas wherein what we communicate by words is out of whack with what we communicate by action.

I think there's a difference in the way authority is perceived and is effected depending upon the mode in which the authority is presented. I think there's a difference in the way the authority of the written word and the authority of the spoken word enhance individual and group autonomy or prolong dependency. I know we're in a time that the whole world is being suffused with the re-presence of the spoken word. The problem is that we live in a world wherein the legacy of authority is in print and the spirit of authority is in speech. This difference between spoken and written authority and its relationship to autonomy needs to be examined. It's the job of people committed to the study of speech-communication to lead in that examination.

Communication is society. I don't see how one can exist without the other and I don't see how the field of speech-communication can continue to exist if it doesn't immediately turn itself to a closer examination, explication, and dissemination of the ways in which speech-communication can make individuals autonomous, society free, and speech-communication research, teaching, and practice socially relevant. The elimination of war, racism, and poverty and the gradual acquisition of autonomy are things worth committing ourselves to and working for. Let's all get out of our bags and do our thing!

COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Jack L. Daniel
University of Pittsburgh

I believe that social problems such as divorce, poverty, the generation gap, racial prejudice, disadvantaged children, etc. are problems for which it may be difficult to demonstrate that communication breakdowns are the major cause. However, it would be very easy to demonstrate that both the lack of, and ineffective communication contribute to these problems. I want to emphasize this because I believe that many people are looking for easy solutions to our social problems. As evidence of this, too often people will hastily and sometimes erroneously suggest that the solution to America's racism involves an "increased dialogue" between the races. Again, "We have to increase the dialogue between generations." Such people seem to believe that we could solve the given social problem if only we would increase the dialogue between the involved parties. But I agree with Saul Alinsky that increased dialogue quite often involves liberals who discuss, and discuss, and discuss until it all becomes disgusting. Instead of simply increased dialogue, I believe that quite often the solution to the problems between parents and their respective children might involve concepts such as "spoiled-rotteness", "closed mindedness", "static conceptions in a process world", resistance to authority", and "conflicting values and levels of aspiration." As a further illustration of the above point of view, I would like to talk briefly about the problem of poverty.

If a war on poverty is to be successful, among other things there must be effective communication between professional people and poor people on at least two levels. First, communication must be effective on a mass basis. Secondly, there must be effective interpersonal, face-to-face communication between professional and poor people. There is ample evidence from research reports and statements from those employed in social agencies which suggests that in many cases communication has not been effective between professional and poor people on either level. Writers such as M. Harrington and B. Bagdikian often refer to the invisibility of the poor, and the "estrangements" of the poor from the middle class. Quite often this invisibility and estrangement involves the lack of effective communication between the middle class and the poor.

In looking for a general explanation for the communication difficulties between professional and poor people, one might make use of the debatable concept of a "culture of poverty". Although social scientists disagree on the concept of a culture of poverty, it would be safe to say that generally the field of experience of a middle class-oriented professional differs significantly from the field of experience of a poor person. Moreover, these differences of experience make communication transactions between professionals and poor people cross-cultural communication transactions. We can take a closer look at these differences in fields of experiences on the two communication levels which I referred to earlier.

On the interpersonal level we find that professionals and poor people have differences in attitudes and values toward basic social institutions. For the professional, the doctor means a precaution. For the poor, the doctor means missed meals and unpaid bills. For one, sex is something controlled and saved for marriage. For the other, sex is one of life's few free pleasures. Next, you have different life styles where in one case legal marriage is the norm and in the other common law is often the norm. In one case, striving for perfect school attendance is the norm and in another case peer groups reinforce one to play hooky. Similarly, there are differences in dominant interests, different vocabularies, different grammars, different aspirations, etc. All of these differences can produce communication barriers when professional and poor people communicate with each other. In many cases the situation is made more complex by this country's past and present history of racism. This history adds the communication barriers of distrust, disrespect, and hatred. Finally, due to both a physical

and psychological estrangement, poor and professional people have stereotypes and misconceptions about each other. These stereotypes and misconceptions become communication barriers. For example, some professionals perceive poor people as ignorant, lacking motivation, unable to make personal decisions, and amoral. Simultaneously, some poor people may perceive professionals as people who think they are superior to poor people in all respects, people who will harm poor people, and as such they are to be distrusted. Thus, communication between professionals and poor people on an interpersonal basis is a complex, cross-cultural matter.

On the mass communications level, professional and poor people have a difficult time communicating with each other for several reasons. For one thing, professional and poor people frequently use different channels for sending and receiving messages. It has been demonstrated by research and by the failures of poverty programs that the normal channels--radio, television, magazines, and newspapers--are not very effective in communicating with poor people. Very few poor people read what Robert Newman calls the "weekly fiction magazines." In those cases where professional and poor people use the same channels, they may have different selective exposures to those channels. Perhaps they watch, read, and listen at different times to different stations, and read different pages.

It has been argued by many people that the effects of mass communications depend heavily upon the intervening variables of reference groups and opinion leaders. Insofar as this is a valid hypothesis, then we must investigate the hypothesis that the characteristics of opinion leaders differ for poor and professional people. As an illustration of what happens when this is ignored, I believe that too often when increasing the dialogue between blacks and whites, white people select white people who happen to wear black skins. Again, I believe that some professionals falsely assume that the "pimp" has positive credibility for poor people.

In seeking ways to improve communication between professionals and poor people I would make the following suggestions (some of which stem from my work on my doctoral dissertation, completed July, 1968):

(1) Research efforts to determine who the opinion leaders are and the psychological makeup of the reference groups for a given poor community. This information will be of great value if the so-called two step flow of communication is a valid notion.

(2) Research efforts to determine the specific factors--verbal and non-verbal--which affect communication between professional and poor people. I state factors here to de-emphasize the message as the focal point of this research, and to emphasize non-verbal factors such as skin color, clothing, kind of car driven, etc.

(3) Dissemination of the above research efforts. I have heard it said that too often such research results stop after having been presented in the professional journals or to a funding agency.

(4) Sensitivity training for professional and poor people.

(5) Identify the formal and informal communication channels among poor people in a given community.

(6) (A) Develop the professional's ability to use and understand the vocabulary and grammar of poor people.

(B) Develop the poor person's ability to use and understand the vocabulary and grammar of the professionals. (This does not refer to the technical vocabulary of the professional.)

It is held here that those who make the claim to be teachers and researchers of human communication ought to be primarily concerned with the analysis of these problems, relevant research, and dissemination of the findings. I also believe that relevant courses should be taught in the high schools and in college classrooms. These endeavors could be encouraged through formal statements from the SAA Research Board, through SAA small research grants, and through SAA convention programs.

FRANKLYN S. HAIMAN
Northwestern University

I would first like to affirm my support for the fundamental and perhaps self-evident concept that all problems of social tension, interpersonal and intergroup hostility, discrimination and racism are not necessarily problems in communication. It follows that in some circumstances the speech-communication specialist may have relatively little to offer toward the amelioration of these problems other than to perhaps clarify the fact that there are limits to what communication can accomplish in situations of serious economic, political, or psychological power imbalances.

I think, too, that we in the speech profession must recognize our own limitations, at least at the present time, with respect to some of the kinds of communication expertise which may be most helpful in contributing to the alleviation of contemporary social problems. I would cite sensitivity training as the most obvious example. Although there is no good reason why teachers of speech-communication cannot and should not equip themselves in this area, the fact is that relatively few have chosen to do so and that the bulk of this responsibility has been assumed by psychologists and a varied assortment of other professional groups associated with the NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science. I think it is significant to our concerns here to note that NTL-related people have moved swiftly and with considerable impact into the urban crisis area, offering training programs for black T-group trainers, mediating racial conflicts in school situations, serving as catalysts for dialogue between police and community leaders (as in Houston), etc. I would urge that to whatever extent members of our professional group are equipped to do this kind of work, they should make their skills known and available.

I would like to offer one other observation regarding sensitivity training or other kinds of "dialogue" as possible amelioratives to our race relations problems. We have had enough experience in this area now to realize that "good" does not always result from such confrontations, and that tension may be exacerbated as well as alleviated. I think that we need to learn much more about the circumstances under which open and direct communication between people is useful, and that extremely helpful research contributions can be made to this question.

Although sections of our cities may continue going up in flames, all of us cannot be firemen, and to some extent at least we must operate on the assumption (erroneous or not) that we will continue to be here next year, and possibly even ten years from now, and that each of us must make his contribution to the solution of society's problems in his own way and according to his own talents and inclinations. Critical as is the problem of speech education in elementary ghetto schools and much as we must encourage this to become a concern of the highest priority for anyone who has any inclination or talent in that direction, some of us are simply not cut out for working with the communication problems of children and of elementary school teachers and must find ways in the college or university context to become more socially relevant.

One of the directions in which we are now moving at my own institution is the introduction of a program of field study in public address and group communication for our junior and senior majors. We plan to make available for these students a full quarter of course credit for working off-campus in the metropolitan Chicago area as participant-observers in a wide range of social action agencies. These students will return to campus for a 3-hour seminar once a week to report and analyze their experiences. We see this program as being not only a valuable and socially involving educational experience for the student, but hopefully of real service to the organizations with which he works.

Furthermore, we would hope that these students may bring back to the campus insights which can make valuable contributions to our total understanding of the role of communication in society's problems. Beyond this step, it is my conviction that our graduate students must be more vigorously encouraged--perhaps even pushed--to undertake field studies of contemporary communication problems for their research. If we move in these directions, plus becoming more sensitive to the consideration of minority group rhetoric in our regular curricular offerings, this may do more than any direct recruiting efforts to attract a less predominantly WASPish group of students to our field.

Finally, I would note that for a long time many speech teachers have played a unique and important role on the college campus. As a result of their opportunities to develop atypically (for faculty) personal relationships with students, they have frequently been able to serve as interpreters of student needs and attitudes to their more remote colleagues and administrators and as helpful consultants to the political efforts of their students. There is no good reason why that role should not be extended--and indeed on a few campuses with which I am familiar this has already happened--to becoming the same kind of "communication brokers" for black students, radical students, or other alienated groups. Although some of our colleagues in the profession may not know sufficiently "where it's at" to play this role comfortably or effectively, there may be others who do, and they should be told that they have the support and blessing in this endeavor of the entire profession.

LYNDREY A. NILES
Federal City College, Washington, D. C.

It is indeed very significant that the SAA has convened such an important conference as this to discuss its relevance to contemporary society. Like so many other learned associations, we have been spending more time with the dead than with the living; we have held fast to history but we have avoided today's society. And certainly the SAA is taking an admirable step in attempting to contribute to the study and solution of today's social problems.

There are specific problems that must be considered if the association is to become socially involved. Some have been previously mentioned, but my remarks will be concerned with three others. The first is the language skills of elementary school children. As a whole, speech teachers have paid too little attention to this problem and have left the burden of oral language development to the English teachers and speech therapists. Unfortunately, most of them are unprepared to cope with dialectical problems and the school systems that have increased the number of therapists to solve the problem have had little significant improvement. The SAA and its members should participate in its solution by expanding the scope of Speech and Speech Education classes to include the elementary school level.

One other supporting point must be added. If these young children are exposed to a program of oral training under qualified teachers in the field, then the degree or extent of misarticulation and language deficiencies so common at the high school and college levels should significantly decrease.

Another general area where research and publications are needed is the oratory of black speakers. Too few speeches are being discussed and appreciated in the classroom and too few criticisms have been published in our journals. Only a few speech departments have approached the subject by offering such courses in "Rhetoric of Revolution" or "Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement." Howard University descriptively calls its course "Black Rhetoric." In view of the social revolution in the U.S. and the greater number of important speeches being made nationally and locally by black members of the community, it is time for greater attention to be paid to this area in our classrooms and in our journals. Bibliographies, manuscripts and criticisms need to be prepared and shared by members of the profession and the SAA could do much in encouraging and directing such research.

In addition, some enterprising students might find adequate scope for research in the campus oratory which formed a compelling force in the several instances of student unrest over the past year. (There might be something new in Speech since Aristotle.)

My third and last point is that of membership. If attendance at SAA conventions is any true indication of the racial balance of the SAA membership, then a job of recruiting black members is direly needed. This job could be made considerably easier if the association does become overtly involved in the black community, its leaders and its language.

I trust that this conference will lay the foundation for the association's active involvement in the contemporary social affairs of our nation.

THE FIELD STUDY IN URBAN TENSION POSITION STATEMENT (1)

Thomas J. Pace
Southern Illinois University

Scholars in the field of communication are concerned too often with the social irrelevancies which they happen to find around them. They have become so removed from the extensional implication of a "real world" that they have become "outsiders," spectators, objective critics; in short, the scholar is all too frequently a "stranger" to the realities of the functional world in which he exists. More pertinent to our own case, it is indefensible for any serious examination of functional communication to be undertaken exclusive of man in his society, that is, of course, unless such a consideration is to be of a purely aesthetic nature. It would appear that an escape from reality is the popular academic attitude at this time, judging from the preponderance of structurally "tight" experimental studies and prose-ridden historical examinations which dominate most journals on communication and its allied disciplines.

The student of communication can no longer afford to deal with his art in an exclusively "ivory tower" context. Rather, he must come to grips with communication as it is employed in a societal setting, dealing with social problems in situ. To approach the study of communication exclusive of social organization and social problems is to cast it purely as an art form rather than a social form--to preclude its function as a significant element in social-political interaction. If the concept of relevance is to be carried beyond that of a conference theme, the attentions of the academic community must be focused immediately on one of the most critical problems of contemporary society--the urban environment, or as it currently has been popularized--the urban crisis.

The words "urban crisis" and "urban tension" have been ubiquitously used in alluding to the contemporary unrest and chaos that is found in the modern cities. The decomposition of the tax base, the magnification of air pollution, sanitation, transportation, and crime, the massive withdrawal to suburbia, the pathological institution of "racism"--all reflect the urgency of the metropolitan system as it fights a battle of survival. And the scope of this urgency no longer permits the leisurely theorizings of the academic community, but rather demands the full mobilization of our intellectual resources in the search of viable solutions.

The urban environment--whether called the metropolis, megapolis, or the extended city--is composed of a complicated set of systems (ecological, economic, transportation, and communication, to mention only a few); and it is only by committing ourselves and our research to those interrelationships which exist between these systems, and most important here, through direct involvement in the urban environment, that we, as scholars and students of communication, can stake a claim as a socially relevant and contributory enterprise.

It was with the purposes in mind that various field studies were initiated and completed by the Speech Department at Southern Illinois University. The intent of these field studies was to gain an understanding of the nature of a relatively new type of extra-institutional organization, the community-action group. Therefore, two researchers moved to Chicago and studied Operation Breadbasket,[2] led by Rev. Jesse Jackson, now the most comprehensively successful Black group in the Chicago ghetto-slum and the Concerned Citizens of Cicero and Berwyn,[3] led by John Pellegrini, the most successful anti-intergration group in the Chicago metropolitan complex. Also, during the summer of 1968, acknowledged leaders[4] of community action groups were brought to the Southern Illinois campus at Carbondale for participation in a seminar on urban tensions.

This quasi-field study allowed students under faculty direction to explore relevant theories of communication analysis focusing on pertinent political social-psychological phenomenon as derived from the interaction with these grass-roots, extra-institutional leaders.

A summary of some of the conclusions formulated concerning the field study as a relevant research method and voluntary community-action groups were:

1. The researcher in communications must realize the fact that he is more of a "stranger" now than ever before. He must creatively confront the fact that common cross-group definitions depended upon in the past for inter-group penetration are lacking in the urban complex.

2. The study of communication in urban tension is in its embryonic stages; thus, an attempt to "force" data into prior concepts of leadership studies typical of Daniel Webster-Henry Clay-Martin Luther King public address studies or "pet" theories attempting to generalize the etiology of all communication problems to a single mechanical dysfunction must be suspended.

3. All ethical, rationalistic, religious, and ethnic assumptions held by the researcher must be suspended as far as possible in order to share the perspective of the group being studied.

4. There must be a willingness on the part of the researchers to take menial, non-decision making jobs in order to be privy to important intra-group information.

5. Perhaps most important to the success of an in-depth analysis of a selected group is the suggestion that you must offer them something of worth. Academic people are viewed with distrust. Extra-institutional groups are interested in:

   a. --transcriptions of taped meetings--
   b. --help with speaking ability of the active membership--
   c. --help with influencing others.

Remember! Do not ask before you offer!

6. A conceptualization of communication without the implications of power incentives in urban situations is as meaningless as economic theories which do not take the reality of the "pay-off" into account.

7. A conceptualization of communication based on the inherent "magic" of dialogue must be replaced by a realistic taking-account of the fact, that discounting power incentives, effective communication may actually intensify rather than ameliorate tension.

8. Actual forces of a given situation may totally obviate the possibilities of communication between extra-institutional community organizations and the existing elected power structure.

9. We must begin to realize the possibility that communication in the electoral, democratic process may have negligible relevance to groups organized expressly around an extra-institutional power base.

10. One positive area of involvement for our profession lies in implementing coalition among groups facing similar problems that presently appear to be fragmented due to histories of misunderstanding.

NOTES

(1) This is a summary of a paper by Thomas Pace, Russell Jennings, and Dennis Winters delivered to the International Conference on General Semantics at Denver, Colorado, in August of 1968.

2 Dennis E. Winters, "A Community-Action Group's Definition of Urban Tension: A Situational Analysis Through Public Address in Cicero, Illinois, in 1967-1968," Unpublished Dissertation, Department of Speech, Southern Illinois University, 1968.

3 Russell W. Jennings, "A Community-Action Group's Definition of Urban Tensions: A Situational Analysis Through Public Address in Cicero, Illinois, in 1967-1968," Unpublished Dissertation, Department of Speech, Southern Illinois University, 1968.

4 Ed Hallo, Cicero Community Council; Bernard Farber, Students for Democratic Society, Roosevelt University Chapter; Stewart Smith, Student for a Democratic Society, Circle Campus of the University of Illinois Chapter; Peggy Terry, Chicago Chapter of J.O.I.N.; Olga Pedroza, Latin Americans Defense Organization; S. Thomas Sutton, Operation Crescent; Calvin Morris, Operation Breadbasket; Steve Telow, Northwest Federation; Robert Lucas, Council of Racial Equality in Chicago; Omar Calzaretta, Citizen's Legislative Action Committee; John Pellegrini, Concerned Citizens of Cicero and Berwyn; Robert Rowan, Parkview Civic Organization.

ROBLEY D. RHINE
University of Colorado

Ever since I received President Ehninger's list of questions I have had the uncomfortable feeling that on the eve of the French Revolution there must have been a group of college professors sitting around a table at the Sorbonne calmly discussing a list of questions comparable to the list that we have before us. I can imagine that among that group were some who saw no problem and subscribed to Marie Antoinette's "Let them eat cake"; there were probably some who took comfort in the thought that a meeting was being held; there were probably some who preferred the comfort of their ivory-tower and took refuge in the need for more research and philosophical analysis; and there may have been a few who could see the on-rushing deluge and who wanted to act. What must they have thought and felt the next morning to find that the Terror was destroying them and all that gave meaning to their existence?

Because I see too many parallels between the French society of 1798 and our society I have a concern to see this conference produce something more than a "Let them communicate" philosophy or a comforting report that a meeting has been held and that concern was expressed.

Let me make clear that I believe the people present to be concerned and that they are convinced that there are problems. But I am not sure what is the extent of our commitment to act.

Is the SAA willing to do something about the problems which confront our society? I think it can, if it will, but I question whether it wills to do something. We have for 54 years striven by every means at our disposal to prove that we are a scholarly body. We have attained that height of scholarly detachment, and we have produced a body of scholars capable of conducting research that we can display with pride. Unfortunately that scholarly detachment looks an awful lot like indifference. Ask yourself how much of the research that appears in our journals is directly applicable to the problems of the racially frustrated, the economically deprived, and the socially alienated? How many of our publications provide any real aid to the elementary or secondary teacher working in the slums, on the reservations, or near the vineyards, the cotton fields, and the sugar beet mills? Which of our programs are oriented to helping the police understand the people they are supposed to be protecting or which are oriented to improving the communication between the white employer and the Blacks, Chicanos, and Indians that he seeks to hire? Most of what we have done looks pretty irrelevant.

Now, if the SAA is really committed to doing something, there are lots of things to be done. Our knowledge of communication and special skills in helping others improve their relationships with others can be applied relevantly--if we will to do so. If the SAA wishes to limit its efforts to research, there are many things to be done. We can aid in giving minority members cultural identity by doing research on their orators and their movements, their actors and their playwrights. We need to know more about what types and patterns of communication occur when a neighborhood is integrated.

If the SAA decides to supply useful materials, we need syllabi for courses, we need bibliographies of such things as materials that might be used in teaching a course on Black oratory. We need texts that are meaningful to ghetto students. If the Association decided that it should commit itself to action, there are many places to help: police need sensitivity training; majority members need help in communicating with minority members; teachers need to be retrained, the poverty stricken need to be helped to communicate effectively enough to get and hold jobs.

There is no shortage of things that we can do, but the whole matter depends on the extent of the commitment of the SAA. Does it really want to do something? And if so, how much? Research, service, and action are all open to us. Whatever we do will be a communication. What message shall we send?

It would be tragic for us to parallel Marie Antoinette's, "if they have no bread, let them eat cake", and the dictum of our time, "if they are impatient, let them have patience" with a similar slogan of indifference, "if they don't communicate, let them talk". If that is to be the position and attitude of the Speech Association, let us know it now.

I would urge those gathered here to say, "Let us Communicate our concern, our interest by planning and implementing a program of research, service, and action". If we do not, I have no doubt that there is a Madam Defarge knitting our names into her long list of the doomed.

COMMUNICATION AND POWER

Donald H. Smith
University of Pittsburgh

There are dreamers, communication theorists, and behavioral scientists who actually believe that men have but to air their problems and discuss their differences and somehow, miraculously, talk will bring about change.

Black babies who are dying in Biafra do not believe it; black boys who are having their heads bashed in by helmeted protectors of the state do not believe it; Indian teen-agers who are committing suicide at an epidemic rate do not believe it; and the old people who have been cast aside do not believe it. Certainly those who exploit, oppress, maim and kill do not believe it. Only the dreamers are so deluded.

The powerful speak and the powerless listen and obey. Communication between the affluent and the poor, the black and the white has been, for the most part, a one-way process in which men with privilege and power have been indifferent to the supplications of the suffering masses.

Enraged black people, who have captured few listeners with traditionally-sanctioned communication efforts, have taken to the streets burning and looting. Even so the rewards have been pitifully few, a hospital in Watts, a hard-core jobs project in Detroit, and the price great: hundreds of black dead, executed as snipers.

In America, some who have championed the oppressed black and other poor, who have spoken for justice and who have sought the truth have, themselves, become the victims and the martyrs of a nation that says it loves justice. There are many truths about our nation, but most white people do not want to hear the truths which are bitter, which invoke guilt.

White racism and the economic exploitation of Afro-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, American Indians, and even poor whites are destroying us. Brave young men who have tried to lead us in achieving our nation's expressed purposes have been assassinated. Medgar Evers, Malcolm "X," Martin Luther King, Jr., John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy have all been murdered by a nation that claims to love freedom and justice but slays its eloquent young prophets.

There is a sickness in the national fabric that will slowly consume us all if we do not stand up like men and save ourselves. Tanks, teargas, napalm and mass killings will not be our salvation, only our destruction. Brave, enlightened, committed men and women will have to forthrightly challenge all of our institutions, risking loss of jobs and loss of life. We must challenge our economic system, our church, and, foremost, our schools. For it is in the schools and the universities that protectors and purveyors of white supremacy continue to poison the minds of children and young scholars.

Yet it is difficult to imagine professors of education or political science or speech helping to deracise America's students until they have, themselves, become deracised. The sick merely reinfest.

If people in speech and communications want to help anybody else in coping with the staggering social holocaust that threatens us all, then speech people will have to heal themselves first. They will have to deal with their own conservatism and racism first. They will have to re-examine scholarship in rhetoric which ignored, or worse never perceived, the immorality of a Patrick Henry who sought freedom for white men, as he, himself, held black men slaves; of a Richard Nixon who speaks alternately of freedom and oppression, not only to different audiences, but also to the same audience. Communicationists will have to question the system of education which has desensitized them to starving children and beaten old people. After bringing health to themselves maybe speech people will be ready to lead their students in unearthing the truth about our national sickness--a sickness that will have to be exposed, exorcised and cured or we are all doomed. Let us hear no more foolish talk of democratic discussion, debate and good intentions. Let us proceed to bring our pain out in the open in the hope that it can lead to salvation.

FREDERICK WILLIAMS
University of Wisconsin

I don't think that there is any doubt that SAA should try to undertake a public service role such as has been described in the letters sent to us. The key question is: Could it?

One might be prompted to venture a premature "yes" to this question because there are so many social problems which seem to intersect with what speech people would consider as pertinent areas of their field. On the other hand, however, even at these points of intersection, I wonder whether the field truly has the resources to cope with the problems. The record of the profession has not been good. To put it more bluntly: Most of what is represented in the speech field is dangerously out of touch with the times. Consider some of the following examples.

Currently, one of the most pressing problems in dealing with the youth in the so-called disadvantaged populations is in the area of functional speech. This is the case in preschool programs such as Headstart. The same problem is seen in evaluations of the primary school curriculum as it is in programs dealing with the young adult as, for example, in the Job Corps. I have noticed that the speech field seems to have no influence at all upon what is being done in these areas. I know of no up-to-date texts from the field which deal with the developing functional speech of the young child, or suitable guides for the elementary school teacher. The National Council of Teachers of English has had more to say of current interest about developing oral skills in children than has been heard from the speech field in the last ten years. I think that in the minds of many, speech education has become the rump of the profession. How unfortunate this is when one considers that this is the area of perhaps the greatest potential social relevance.

The situation is just as bleak on the college level. Recently, I have heard it charged that public speaking courses are racist. This is hard for a white, middle class professor to understand until he considers that most of what is said in the basic public speaking texts is the traditional platitudinous advice for the middle-class white. Nothing in these books aids the students in understanding that there are social class differences and ethnic differences in modes of effective speech. Some of the more recent versions of these texts seem to have taken pains to include a few examples from Negro speakers (because they no doubt appealed to white audiences) and even a picture or two of Negro students when the books were illustrated. At the same time, not one of the books that I know of says anything about the functional aspects of Negro dialect. Compared with the current research in social dialectology going on in this country, speech texts seem to be at least a generation out of date.

Perhaps most frustrating of all is to look at the current research conducted (and published) within the profession. One is hard pressed to see much of social relevance. From the character of our journals, the best advice for a career in speech is to bask in the ideas of the past or to bandy about some of the theoretical gems of other fields. To be sure, this is overstating the case, but I would challenge the profession to reveal one major piece of research that has had a significant--no, even a noticeable--influence upon any of the programs dealing with contemporary social problems.

I want to end with one positive suggestion. I would argue that as its first attempt at performing a public service, the SAA challenge every member of the field to examine his own thoughts about the contemporary relevance of the speech profession. So far as I am concerned, that the field serves a "supradisciplinary" function or that there is "unity in diversity" are only empty slogans, and at the worst, they are offensive to those whose substantive areas are swept up within them. It is time to peek under the SAA canopy to see if there is enough of substance to revitalize and make relevant a field that must undergo an intellectual revolution if it is to keep pace with the social revolution which now envelopes us.

REPORT OF THE RESEARCH AND ACTION PROGRAMS SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE 8-9 AUGUST SAA INVITATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL RELEVANCE

Frankiyn Haiman
Robley Rhine
Frank Dance (reporter)

We recognize that contemporary social problems are the result of multiple causation (e.g. power relationships, economic security, etc.) and that simplistic communication cures are neither available nor desirable. Therefore, a high priority effort needs to be made to more carefully delineate the speech-communication dimensions of contemporary social problems. In order to help sort out speech-communication involvement in contemporary social problems specific programs are suggested. Both basic and applied research programs are equally balanced as are action programs. The importance of feeding back program results to the groups studied is emphasized.

Research

1. Study the circumstances under which face-to-face verbal interaction between opposing individuals and groups serves in the improvement or the deterioration of the relationship.

2. Study the power of speech-communication theory as a source of explanation and solution of contemporary social problems.

3. Study how audiences in the various subcultures define themselves in terms of speech-communication norms and expectations.

4. Study the relationship between acceptance of authority and the modality (spoken, written) in which authority is communicated.

5. Increase attention to the role of minority group communicators (speakers, dramatists, etc.).

6. Study the historical communicative cultures of minority groups.

7. Study the relationship of mass-media communication to contemporary social problems.

8. Study the relationship of vocal to non-vocal communication in contemporary social problems.

9. Study of the communication development of the pre-school child.

10. Study of the communication significance of social dialect features.

11. Study, together with NCTE, of those school conditions that discourage a student's communication development.

12. Study the student's attitude toward language.

13. Study the extent to which various illegal behaviors (civil disobedience, draft resistance) may or may not be causally related to incitement by speech.

14. Investigate the circumstances in which white speakers can be effective with black ghetto audiences and vice versa.

Action

1. To aid in the establishment and operation of rumor clinics.

2. To compile and disseminate course syllabi, bibliographies, et al. that aid in establishing courses for black curricula, hispanic curricula, free universities, etc.

3. To encourage members to make themselves available as communication experts to community organizations, action groups, etc.

4. To increase our offerings in field research opportunities.

5. To assist in educating members of the white community to acceptance of wider variations in acceptable employee speech-communication.

6. To actively recruit, through example, from minority groups.

7. To solicit manuscripts from SAA members with special interests but with little publication experience.

8. To provide a consultation-lecture source for departments desiring outside professional assistance in course and curriculum preparation for social relevance.

9. To offer a one week summer social relevance re-orientation workshop.

10. To provide a pre-convention social relevance re-orientation workshop.

11. To prepare and distribute the papers presented at the 8-9 August conference.

12. To encourage the establishment of communication task forces in all large cities.

13. To request the formation of an ad hoc Committee on Social Relevance as a permanent committee of the Speech Association of America.
    A. The committee to find, identify, and engage those members of the speech profession with interests in contemporary social relevance.

    B. The committee to sponsor an open meeting at the December, 1968 SAA convention for the purposes of assessing member interest and charting future goals and directions.

    C. The committee to prepare and publish a Committee newsletter with the administrative support of the SAA.

A MANIFESTO TO THE SPEECH PROFESSION

From A Concerned Committee of Students and Teachers

Reflecting our opinion that the current professional involvement and scholarly productivity of the speech field are dangerously irrelevant and of a negligible influence upon our contemporary society, and recognizing that the profession must undergo an intellectual revolution within a society that is undergoing a social revolution, we the undersigned challenge all concerned persons to address themselves to the following issues:

1. Are we a field aimed only at the perpetuation of white, middle class standards and concepts of human discourse?

   A. Do the curricula, the textbooks, and the scholarship of the profession do anything to increase our understanding of discourse which is not within the white, middle class norm?

   B. Isn't it the case that our contemporary textbooks on public speaking which reach many undergraduate students outside of the field present a mainly idealistic series of prescriptions for effective speaking and listening within the aforementioned norm, and offer little for the student whose social existence is outside that norm?

   C. Why is it that more minority group members are not attracted to the speech profession? What have we done to alleviate this problem, and what have we done to encourage the dissemination of ideas and opinions of minority group members who are within the profession?

2. Are we a field that can contribute anything of relevance to an understanding of, and solutions to, the problems of our contemporary society?

   A. Do our graduate students feel that their training has sufficient relevance to the needs of a contemporary scholar and teacher? Is such training only perpetuating rather than advancing the profession?

   B. What, if anything, of contemporary relevance to our society is emanating from the professional activities of the members of the field? Are the rhetorical critics too self-effacing to give some emphasis to the assessment of contemporary discourse? Are the rhetorical theorists too involved in the reinterpretation of old ideas to give the needed emphasis to the development of new and relevant ones? Are the behaviorists addressing themselves more to methodological niceties than to problems of theoretical and social relevance? Why in the midst of a period where so much emphasis is being given by others to the development of speech in children is our area known as speech education so negligibly influential?

   C. Should our professional association remain politically neutral (or apathetic) on problems and issues which confront our contemporary society and which intersect upon the assumed capabilities of the scholar, teacher, and student of speech?

3. Are the current professional structures of the field to blame for our lack of involvement in contemporary problems?

A. Are we members of a single profession only by the administrative definition of departments of speech and the "canopy" organization of our professional societies, or are we united by a common concern for the advancement and implementation of our knowledge of the art and science of human discourse? If the latter, what is being done in our schools, in our professional meetings, and in our journals to pursue such advancement and implementation?

B. How can our professional structures best stimulate and support programs of research, service, and action-- programs which advance the field in its now unfilled role in our contemporary society?

It is our understanding that the Speech Association of America, which convened the meeting that led to the formation of the present committee and which has agreed to provide the administrative support for the distribution of this document, will further act to provide a forum for its discussion at the 1968 national convention. It should be emphasized, however, that we the undersigned have prepared this document only as a statement of our collective position at this time. We challenge other members of the profession to examine their own positions.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Social Relevance

Jack L. Daniel, Chairman
John C. Condon, Jr.
Frank E. X. Dance
Franklyn Haiman
Thomas Hopkins
Charles G. Hurst, Jr.
Rosa Lee Nash
Lyndrey A. Niles
Thomas Pace
Robley Rhine
Donald H. Smith
Frederick Williams

ADDENDA

Note: The brief statements and questions that follow have been culled from the tape recording of the Chicago conference. For the most part they are recorded here in paraphrase. Although consensus on a number of the statements was expressed, they should not be interpreted as consensus statements of the conference.

We often seem to operate on the assumption that, if you bring people together, they will communicate-- that physical proximity results in communication. We need to know more about this assumption. When and under what circumstances does dialogue help.

There are severe problems involved in isolating the communication dimensions of social problems.

Is it really possible to identify, study, and bridge communication gaps?

We are steadily losing ground in our ability to communicate with one another. Problems associated with poverty and race widen the communication gap.

We must be careful that we don't fall under the spell of the concept of the magic of dialogue as a panacea.

There is need for basic research, applied research, and pedagogical research. There is also immediate need for action programs.

Persons who are not themselves of the ghetto are not in a position to do research in the ghetto.

Built-in biases are a fundamental handicap to valid, needed research. Race bias is but one of many kinds that hamper researchers. If whites are indeed racist, and if they indeed have biases, what should they do about it?

Whites, when they finally accept the racist charge, sometimes retreat from the real arena where problems are because they have been convinced that their racism is an insuperable conflict.

Studies about the attitudes of various populations toward their own and others' language patterns are needed.

Functional communication particularly in young children, may provide a focus for efforts in this area by our field.

What additional research is needed regarding modalities in communication? What are, for example, the "authority" dimensions of spoken vs. written discourse?

Clear messages are being sent-- but there are other factors that mitigate against the achievement of desirable social goals.

We need to know more about the communication dimensions of violence. Are there dimensions of communication theory-- in both verbal and non-verbal areas-- that are applicable in situations where violence appears to be a communication component?

What are the relationships between rational and non-rational discourse? Are there times when each has advantages in securing certain desirable social ends?

Is communication power?

What is the communicative significance of social dialect features?

Theory and pedagogical applications relative to speech competencies are needed. Laboratory and field studies are needed.

Research relative to the elementary school oral language arts program-- its status and its relevance to the real needs of children for better speaking and listening competencies-- is needed.

Measurement of communicative competencies-- functional communication-- is badly underdeveloped.

How can youngsters-- through formal educational structures-- be given greater linguistic flexibility-- a broader repertory of language codes toward the end that their range of options in society are not restricted?

How can classroom procedures be adjusted to accommodate the natural proclivities for spoken language of most kids?

Language teaching in all of its modes has placed too much stress on non-functional aspects. Language modification programs should have functional communication as their central core.

Developmental work in teacher preparation programs for teachers of poverty children is needed. Elementary school teachers need to know a good deal more about the language patterns of their students. Teachers (and the citizenry at large) need to have more sophisticated attitudes toward language variations.

Maybe we need to think less about research and more about doing something about communication-related problems that we face.

Action programs-- with built-in evaluation procedures-- are needed.

Might not feedback of research findings to the communication populations researched prove helpful to those communities?

There is a problem in sorting out our individual roles-- as teachers, as researchers, and as individual citizens. A related problem is that of determining what can best be done in the Association and what can best be done by individual members and/ or by institutions.

How can the de facto segregation that characterizes the SAA be ameliorated?

There is need for bibliographic information relative to black rhetoric, et al.

We need textbooks that take a less narrow, less WASPish viewpoint.

SAA recruitment of black members is needed, but it needs to be done in non-traditional ways and in a manner that is fully tailored to the needs of black people.

Courses that are more related to things as they really are will attract minority registrants.

Social publications sponsored by SAA might help institutions to, for example, revamp their basic speech courses, develop special courses in the rhetoric of revolt, etc., etc.

SAA might sponsor a special "speakers' bureau" -- a traveling team that would help departments to revamp their curricula. Alternatively, summer workshops and/ or pre-convention workshops might be sponsored by SAA toward these same ends.

SAA may be able to function best by bringing together like-minded people to serve as a coordinating agency and a communication channel.

MEMORANDUM SENT TO CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

TO: Participants in the SAA Conference on Social Engagement

FROM: Douglas Ehninger

SUBJECT: Agenda for Conference

DATE: July 29, 1968

I am delighted that you have found it possible to be with us on August 8 and 9 for the SAA conference on social engagement. It seems to me it is high time that SAA turned its collective attention to the communication-related aspects of social problems, and I look forward to a most productive meeting.

As Bill Work stated in his memorandum of July 23, the broad purposes of the conference are to inventory these problems, identify resources, and recommend actions which SAA might take in connection with them. So far as a more specific agenda is concerned, I hope that we may employ a loosely structured round-table format in which the participants feel free to follow the avenues that seem most productive to them.

At the same time, I think it is important (1) that we focus as consistently as possible upon what I have called "the communication-related aspects" of these problems, and (2) that we be in a position to produce at the close of the conference some sort of organized summary report. For these reasons, I suggest that, subject of course to revisions as the deliberation proceeds, we think along the following lines:

1. What areas of tension, unrest, alienation, and upheaval appear to have breakdowns in communication as a major cause?

2. What is the specific nature of the communication failure involved?

3. What are some of the ways in which this failure could be repaired?

4. Should teachers of speech as individuals and as organized in SAA attempt to make such repairs, or should they merely play the role of detached observer-scholars?

5. If they should undertake to make such repairs as they can, what immediate steps should be taken and what long-range attacks planned?

6. In either case, how should this conference be followed up and its results disseminated?

In addition, I would envision each participant making a short statement, as informally or formally as he might choose, at the beginning of the conference--not in the sense of going on record but merely as a way of throwing his thinking into the hopper and getting the discussion rolling. If as a result of the subsequent deliberations you choose to adhere to the position thus stated, that would be perfectly all right, of course. On the other hand, I hope you will feel free to change your ideas as the conference progresses, and perhaps to come out with something quite different at its conclusion.

If, upon studying the above, an improved plan of procedure occurs to you or if you have specific suggestions or comments to offer, please send them to me here at The University of Iowa. Questions concerning the hour schedule, hotel arrangements, etc. should be addressed to Bill Work in New York.

I shall look forward to seeing you in Chicago at noon on August 8th.